

# Rancho Mastatal Updates

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## March 2007

*Rancho Mastatal UPDATE for the month of MARCH 2007. We hope that this finds everyone out there well and flourishing in their lives and work as well as enjoying the transition to spring. From what we've heard regarding this winter up north, there should be many fewer disbelievers about what Mr. Gore says about our planet. Sixty-degree weather in January in Upstate New York. That's pretty scary stuff. As you, we're also going through a season of transition. Firstly, we're moving from the dry to the wet season. This means an abundance of green, running out to the clothesline on a daily basis, remembering to roll up the car windows and muddy, slippery games of Ultimate. It also denotes a refocusing of our energy just a bit as rainy afternoons oftentimes force us to find work indoors whereby we've been accustomed to the luxury of rainless afternoons during these last many months. This is a time perhaps to reflect a bit more and get to some of those novels we've been wanting to read. With our move from dry to wet, we also find ourselves turning over our volunteer corps. We've had a nucleus of amazing workers with us since January, most of whom have recently left or will be departing in the coming weeks. This signifies tearful goodbyes and the making of plans for when to see one another again in the future. It also portends a new crew of incoming interns and volunteers. Those that will be with us for the long stretch with SUSAN's students and on into the busy summer (our winter) months. As much as we'll miss some of our closest and truly amazing friends (if you haven't heard, we have the most incredible, caring, ass-kicking volunteers on the planet), we'll be looking forward to the new blood. The University of Washington's spring quarter abroad at the Ranch recently descended upon us for yet another year of fun and studies in Mastatal. This year's group has definitely left a super positive impression during their first week in town. You can read on below for some more information. This edition also includes some awesome pieces on eating well, our new timberframe love shack, Sir Roger's Superstar Day and a lot more. So grab yourself a maté and pull up a comfortable seat so that you may enjoy to the max our latest supplement. Before letting you do that though I'd like to mention that we are beginning our annual search for fall Ranch sitters. If you're interested in looking after the Ranch during the time that Robin and I will be visiting family and friends stateside, please send us an email so that we can begin discussing the details. Thanks.*



Interior of the Hankey House

photo by Stephen Newbold

This month's update includes:

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**Building Report:** Rockin' Out with Skip and Lizabeth

**Volunteer/Guest Gossip:** Sir Roger Whalley's Superstar Day

**Community Facts/Stories:** Alcides Update – New Stove on the Way

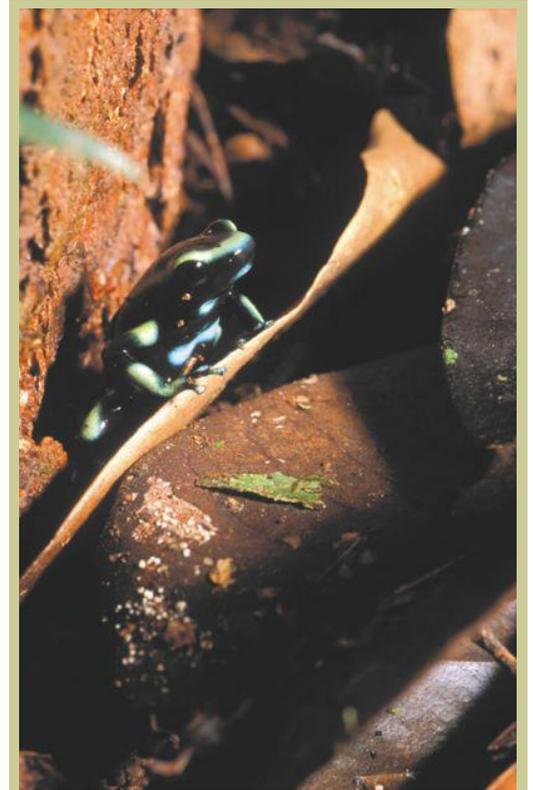
**Comida Corner:** Tamarind-Date Chutney

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### **RM Program News: Return of the Dawgs**

We've begun preparations for our longest group visit of the year, SUSAN's quarter abroad with her students from the University of Washington. This year's scholars will be working on a wide array of projects ranging from poison dart frog studies to intense canopy exploration. The undergraduates will be working towards a full quarter of credits for their university requirements. Susan first came to the Ranch in 2002 for a quick visit and to scope out educational opportunities for her and her students. What was then a cordial conversation has become one of the most exciting programs that the Ranch hosts during the year. Over the years Susan and her students have made an immense impact on the community and the Ranch. Their work has included the construction of the community bus stop, the murals on the community center walls, a new compost bin for the main house composting toilets, and a compilation of an incredible amount of scientific data and information so that we can figure out how to best to conserve our precious and beautiful forests and streams. We're fired up to have the Dawg crew back with us into early-June. We'll report back with more UDub news in subsequent newsletters. And if you have any high school, college and/or university contacts please tell them about the Ranch and our programs as we're always looking for new institutions to add to our growing list.



*A poison dart frog perches on a leaf in La Cangreja National Park*

*photo by*



*First outdoor communal dinner on the back porch of the ranch house*

*photo by John "Buck" Banks*

## **Conservation Update: Good Eats, Good Eating**

This was kindly written up by JULIE AITCHENSON, a former volunteer, for the Ranch's information binder. Thanks Julie!

Dear Visitor,

Perhaps you have already partaken of the food fiesta that is mealtime at Rancho Mastatal, or perhaps you are sitting, as I once did, at the beautiful wooden table next to the kitchen, perusing the Visitor's Binder and trying not to salivate on the plasticized pages as the aromas of pre-meal preparations drifted past. I remember this moment like it was yesterday, as clearly as I remember the meal itself, which

(having taken place on Baking Monday) materialized as mile-high bagel sandwiches on bagels still warm from the cob oven. I thought I'd died and gone to Zanzibar! Even more astonishing than this abundant and nutritious spread, though, were the moments following the pre-dinner thanks-giving. Having lived in community before, I was used to the hand-clasping "en groupe", the words of appreciation and reflection on the day (a ritual I always look forward to). What I was not prepared for was the absence of a churning stampede towards the victuals as the circle concluded. ! As I stood, practically pawing the ground in my eagerness to get my hands on a hot, chewy bagel, my new comrades placidly filtered out the door and arrayed themselves around the front porch in utter contentment. The evening cooking crew practically had to bust out the cattle prods to get folks inching towards the chow line. It wasn't that they weren't, every last one of them, HUGELY looking forward to taking the edge off of a well-earned hunger. This behaviour was simple a concession to the fact that there is, at Rancho Mastatal, always time for things to be done slowly and with appreciation, and that there is always enough for everyone. Coming from a family where the "Fork Stabbing of 1991" incident (involving an uninitiated visitor and the last spoonful of German potato salad) is recalled only by those outside the family who might take such behavior amiss, this gracious attitude was simply astounding. During my time at the Ranch, it became my own personal practice to see if I could out-wait the more hardcore of the "No! , please, you first"-ers. No small task, given the insistence of my considerable appetite, and the endurance of the Mastatal veterans.

Eventually, such graciousness will come easy to you, and you will be languorously lounging, empty-bellied, with the best of them. What may prove more difficult, given the highly social nature of meal times, and the appetite you will have acquired after a hard day of ranch work, is the ability to chew your food thoroughly and consciously, appreciating every bite, and giving your body time to make proper use of every forkful. Amidst the banter, planning, and lusty enjoyment of mealtimes, it is easy to lose track of these simple practices, but given the whole foods nature of the diet at Rancho Mastatal (requiring an especially hardy digestion), and the general emphasis on conscious consumption, they are fairly central to harmonious Ranch life. Consider it as much a part of walking your sustainability talk as using the palatial composting toilets or building with renewable local resources. To that end, here are a few tips to get you started (and if you notice

fewer, um, by- products of poor digestion, it's no coincidence!):

\* It has been said that digestion starts in the mouth, but I believe it begins with the eyes and nose. By taking a moment to appreciate the sights and smells of the food (and taking time to choose what you eat based on what looks and smells most appealing to you at that time), you prompt the production and secretion of essential digestive enzymes in the mouth and throughout the digestive tract that can then be recruited to help you make the most of your food. \* It has also been said, by many a wise Vedic scholar, that when you eat standing up, DEATH looks over your shoulder. Not a subtle message, but I doubt these dudes lived to be 120 years old by being subtle (or eating standing up). That's just to say that when you are eating, EAT! Don't waste the precious energy your body needs for digestion (or disrespect the sanctity of food- something too many in the world do without) by taking it for granted. \* Chew your drink and drink your food. The salivary enzymes produced in your mouth, as well as the mechanical digestion provided by proper chewing (you're going for baby food consistency) give your guts a BIG break when they're called upon to play their role in digestion, so they can focus on the crucial phase (assimilation) where your body chooses what it needs to absorb, and what can be passed on as waste. Similarly, ensalivating the liquid you consume (i.e. swishing it around in your mouth a bit and warming it up), and keeping it to between 4-6 oz. within 1/2 hour of eating, will avoid the hazard of diluting those essential enzymes or freezing up your digestion with an ice cold beverage. \* Lots of folks need a couple of days to get used to the hearty goodness of Ranch food, so do yourself a favor (at least at first) and keep it simple. If you're feeling particularly hard done by the plethora of pintos, try eating them without a grain. Or, in the reverse, take a grain with some veggies and fats and save protein for the next meal. This isn't always an option, but give it a try when the opportunity presents itself. You might notice that you have a bit more energy after a meal, as your body requires less of it to digest the simple fare. Also, a serving size of two, cupped handfuls should be enough to keep you going. Bigger person=bigger hands=bigger portions. See! It works out! Unless you are very large, but have freakishly small hands. In this instance, you might want to ask a large-handed person to measure your food for you.

So, enjoy with gratitude, kiss the cooks (if they'll let you), and make the commitment to conscious consumption!



*Alan seating two rafters on the roof of 'El Nido'*

## Building Report: Rockin' Out with Skip and Elizabeth

photo by Stephen Newbold

The long anticipated Yestermorrow

Design/Build class has finally arrived; and those two potato launching, mallet dueling pair from the near Arctic lands of New England appeared to undertake what some say is the most ambitious project at RM. As SKIP and LIZABETH started to work out the details of this year's project, students slowly started to trickle through the front gates, passing unassumingly beside the giant crosscut saw that stands guard to the entrance of our home. This saw served omen to the year's design and build challenge: a classically Timber-framed Couples Cabin. We had a most capable group assembled together to tackle a timber-frame of the likes that had never been tried before on Ranch property. Together, with the architectural talents of SAMIR, BETSY, and ANNA; the building experience of RYAN, ERIN, and MIKE; the artistic eyes of MALIAN, EMMA, and TAIGA, the all-around experience of JAMIE, the amazing vision of JAKE, and the much needed humor of JON; we were sure to create a couples cabin which would be a sought after private den of beauty and romance. No sooner had the class viewed the intended building site, and TIMO, TYLER, NATE, ALAN, GILBERTH, ALEX, and the rest of the Rancho snapped into site construction mode.

After touring previous years' projects and going over the basic goals of the class, SKIP and LIZABETH bestowed artistic and creative license to transform a simple timber-frame into the most sensual, striking, functional, and fashionable love nest that one could dream up. And with such an unfettered release of imagination and ingenuity, it was a miracle that a group as varied as ours could reach consensus on design in anything less than the length of the entire class. Yet, within three days all voices had been heard, detailed and workable drawings were produced, folks were excited to start cutting frame, and only a slight bit of blood was spilt (certainly not the last time, damn them sharp chisels)!

We took a short break from pencil and paper, field tripping up to the Zapatón Reservation to meet with RAFAEL PEREZ and his family who exuded pride about his thatched rancho, variety of crops, and many daughters. After we finally found JAKE hiking his way back to Mastatal, the group beelined back to the Ranch to help with the infamous teak haul, form building and site prep. Finally, four days of design and groundwork, and now we could finally start `sawring, scoring, and boring' those mortises and tenons. From the shop rose a plume chips and sawdust, a flurry which would soon produce a magnificent post and beam structure.

A week into the class, Saturday evening, the `worker ants' of Mastatal, as DONA MARIA refers to us, decided to go brush their shoulders off and tear up the baile at San Miguel. After a night of *guaro* and thudding bass, the class was ready for a lazy Sunday day-off day-hiking, brunching, and watching the Mastatal Cabalgata horse parade pass through town. Well rested, we were ready to hit those chisels full force, cutting tie beams, rafter plates, posts, braces, girts, and rafters. A few days into the second week, we divided into a couple groups working on pouring the earthen floor in the classroom, wattle and daubing, and finishing the final touches on the frame. Thanks to NATE and ALAN the entire frame was finished to gorgeous hand-planed pine as well.

Alas, the day had arrived for a gosh darn ol' fashioned barn raising. All of the hard work of the last nine days, from design to build, finally materialized into a thing of immense beauty with the

driving of a few teak pegs. And within three hours of fiddle-filled peg pounding, the love nest sat perched overlooking the bosque of Mastatal, and we, the students, leaned against the solid structure empowered and content. Another year's Yestermorrow project is added to the stunning collection of exquisitely and masterfully crafted living spaces that grace the Rancho property. Indeed, TIMO and ROBIN may have quite a waiting list on their hands to inhabit the new lovers' cabin, El Nido, 'the Nest.' Thanks to everyone who made this beautiful dwelling possible, especially to those master-builders SKIP and LIZABETH.



*About to tug on Roger Day*

### **Volunteer/Guest Gossip: Sir Roger Whalley's Superstar Day**

It began with three blows of the conch, as it must according to the document drafted and approved last year by the Ranch's legislature. Following that ceremonial start, Robin made an attempt at reading the Roger Day Declaration, only to tearfully hand it over to Timo after a few sentences. Standing beneath the gloomy though rainless skies, we were all reminded of Roger's tremendous spirit and importance to the people of Mastatal.

Then the team members of Old Blue Ribbon, Filthy Gorgeous, Ass Kicking Rampage, and

Maverick's Minions went down to the field to represent. Once again, we kicked things off with a relay of ridiculous events, including sack and three-legged races. Timo sprinted down the field during the anchor leg, dizzy lizzy, almost ensuring victory for Ass Kicking Rampage.

Unfortunately, he underestimated the scrappiness of Filthy Gorgeous, which narrowly earned the victory. This announcement was almost drowned out by trash talking from Alan and his Jersey crew on Old Blue Ribbon, who believed their team to be the winners. Well, there is a reason that Alan's knick name is Sucia.

Master of Ceremonies Tyler declared a three-way tie for first in the egg toss, which was followed by Herculean Tug of War. The saturated pitch made for a great battleground. Robin (Maverick) and her minions brought the most muscle to the competition and made an impressive showing. Or perhaps the other teams were just taking it easy on her since it was her birthday. What a great way to celebrate the fifth anniversary of Robin's thirtieth birthday. Thanks Roger!!

Championship Futbol, a favorite of Sir Roger, rounded out the activities. The locals were well represented by Ion, Kattia, Karol, Cris, Marcos, Greivin, Junior, and Caraca. Ion was great in goal and Kattia took our favorite Spanish speaking duck to school a few times. Even Chingo got in on the action, blocking a few shots and making some incredible defensive moves. By the end, teams were thrown aside and everyone present joined in, making it difficult to determine a winner. But in the spirit of Superstar Day, aren't we all winners? At least that is what my second grade teacher always told me.

Each year when Roger Day is celebrated, we continue to pay tribute to an incredible individual in a

way that he would most appreciate. By gathering together as a Ranch and greater Mastatal community, we create more memories that serve to remind us of what a unique and extraordinary place this is.



*La Guajira Morada, a chalk pastel by Delfino Cornali, now hangs on a special wall in La Choza*

*photo by Delfino Cornali*

### **Community Facts/Stories: Alcides Update – New Stove on the Way**

If you've been reading the monthly newsletter you know that a local man recently received solar lighting as a result of Solar Energy International's great work, after living under the same roof with no light for 34 years.

Alcides is a pleasant and quiet man with a gentle handshake. He has lived alone much of his life. While observing the installation of the solar system at Alcides' house, a few of us noticed that his cooking setup, though effective, might also be presenting a health hazard. Currently he uses a large metal drum, filled with wood ash, with a metal grate lying across the top. Beneath the grate Alcides burns wood to create fire for cooking. This is inside his kitchen with no chimney. The wood ceiling in the kitchen is blackened and charred from years of exposure to smoke and the open flame of a cooking fire.

Last week Tyler and I visited Alcides to ask him if he'd be interested in improving his stove. I should say I accompanied Tyler who speaks fluent Spanish, while I speak approximately 20 non-conjugated phrases. Both of my visits to Alcides' home have been awesome experiences. To get there we walked across the river, then up a narrow dirt road that is only trekked on foot or horseback and leads to Santa Rosa.

Alcides is an incredibly resourceful man. Several chickens that provide some of his food roam freely. Much of the property is gardened with fruit trees and he maintains several trails around his home, down to the river. His house is quaint, with dirt floors, and protects him from the elements. After a brief walk of the area around the house, Ty-Stick asked him if we could see his kitchen.

Once there Ty shared with Alcides that we thought he was potentially being exposed to too much smoke and that it wouldn't be difficult to improve on that situation. We were happy to hear that Alcides was already thinking about getting a new drum to replace the time-beaten one that had served him for so long. He agreed that the exposure to smoke was a potential health problem and is willing to try a new stove. As we left Alcides gave us a gift; a bag of about 10 very large eggs. He said they were not chicken eggs, but another local fowl, a name that we didn't understand. We guessed maybe turkey eggs, and they were delicious.

Here at the Ranch we are in the process of designing a stove that will be more energy efficient, user-friendly and, most importantly, produces much less smoke in the cooking area, than the one Alcides is now using. There is much to consider when thinking about what kind of stove to design, i.e. the space it is going into (small); the kind of cooking the user does and how many pots will potentially be used at once; access to the kinds of materials necessary for a given stove; remembering that we are crossing a river on a road with no car access, considering how to get all the materials to the house.

As of now we are leaning towards designing a rocket stove with either an earthen or steel exterior. The rocket stove is an energy efficient design that uses L shaped stove-pipe (or ceramic L shaped interior chimney) to create a steadily burning fire with small wood pieces for fuel. The wood will burn at the lower end of the L shaped pipe cut into the drum or earthen wall. The top of the pipe will be where the steady flame exits for cooking. If designed and used properly minimal smoke should be produced because it will be burned off in the stove pipe by the steady fire. In between the stove pipe and the drum will be an insulation material like wood ash, topped by a grate to hold the pot. Around the pot will be a steel sleeve a few centimeters from the exterior to hold in heat, which often gets lost in the cooking process.

For more information on the rocket stove design concept do a web search on the Aprovecho Research Center website. If all goes as planned Alcides will be cooking on a safer, more efficient and healthier stove by the time the next newsletter is out.

Have a great spring. A Smith

### **Comida Corner:Tamarind-Date Chutney**

This is an all-time favorite chutney on Indian nights here at the Ranch. It is sweet and tangy with a bit of chili to round it off. We don't have dates here in Mastatal, so we substitute raisins. This recipe comes from [Indian Vegetarian Cooking At Your House](#) by Sunetra Humbad and Amy Schafer Boger, M.D. We serve it with samosas but it goes well on everything.

Tamarind pulp is used in Sri Lanka, India, Mexico, and other tropical regions the way lemon is used as an acid seasoning agent in



*photo by Anna Simms*

the West. This sticky brown fruit from the tamarind tree tastes like apricots and dates. The pulp, contained in a leguminous pod with a tan, papery skin, surrounds inedible seeds. To use, boil in water to cover for 2 minutes. Allow to cool. With your fingers, press the seeds from the pulp. Discard the seeds. Using a fork, puree the pulp with the water to create an extract. You will be able to find tamarind in Indian, Asian, or Mexican specialty stores or in the international section of your supermarket.

In a cast iron skillet, dry roast, stirring constantly for about 2-3 minutes, until lightly browned:

1 Tablespoon cumin seeds

Puree together in a blender:

8 ounces (1 ½ cups) pitted dates, coarsely chopped (or raisins)

1 cup water

1 Tablespoon tamarind paste

½ teaspoon salt

3-4 dried hot peppers (or to taste)

the roasted cumin seeds

Check the thickness and add more water to give it the consistency of heavy cream, about 1 ½ more cups. You can add sugar if you think it's not sweet enough.

This will keep in the refrigerator up to 6 months; thin it with water as necessary.

Makes 2¾ cups.

*Buen Provecho!*

### **F?tbol Follies: Here Come the Rains**

The Galacticos managed another trip to San Vicente a couple weeks ago, assembling a hodge-podge squad of young-timers and a couple rare wearers of the yellow jerseys, dryboy barkeep SECO and underrated student athlete WERNER. With RANDALL in goal and a couple beers deep, it was clear from the beginning this would be just a friendly match, against Cerbatana, an older squad from just outside Puriscal. Mastatal exerted its dominance early but took its time finding the back of the net. CARACA put the first one in but the score was quickly tied again after a mix-up in the Galactico backfield. Seco entered the lineup in the second half, almost immediately injuring himself near the goal and exiting the game in despair. Nevertheless, Mastatal kept the pressure on, landing two more goals from Cara and JUNIOR. Yet sloppy goalkeeping led to a tied score at the end of regulation. After the typical Tico milling around, penalty kicks were eventually implemented, with the Galacticos easily securing a 4-1 victory. *Al suave...*

Here we are now in Semana Santa, where the rain gods have decided to resurrect the wet season in somewhat abrupt fashion. Over the course of the last week the signs have manifested themselves in muddy shoes and moldy laundry, while roof and gutter work have moved to the top of the project list. What does this entail for the follies? Unfortunately, given the freakishly low level of play this dry season, it's not as if *futbol* will come to a screeching halt in Mastatal. For whatever reason, the number of official Galactico matches in the new year hasn't even topped a half dozen. The mejenja count is equally sinful, thanks in part to a neglected pitch whose eastern goalpost finally gave way recently, sprinkling rust over the grass below. Now with the rains popping up on the radar, and still

no drainage work or grass seeding, it looks as if the old Mastatal plaza will sadly drown through another winter season. Not that there won't be any action out there in the coming months...

### **Inspirational Impressions: Don Mario**

For this part of the newsletter we usually look to famous writers or profound philosophical thinkers for our inspiration but oftentimes the ones who are truly enlightened are in our midst. One of the most genuine individuals known to exist lives among us in this little corner of the world and he has provided the inspirational impression for this month.

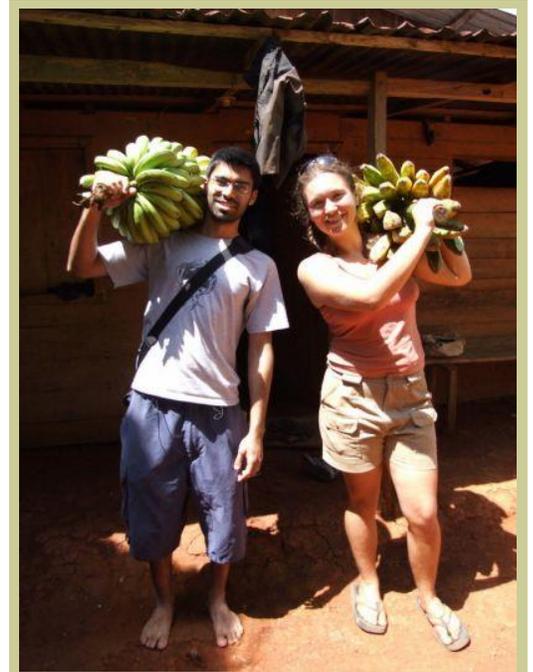
When asked, "What is the key to a long and happy life?"  
The epic Don Mario replied,

*"Eat a big breakfast and be noble to everyone you meet."*

Truer words have never been spoken.

*Abrazos,*

The Ranch Crew



*Fetching banana stalks from Zapaton  
photo by Stephen Newbold*